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LUCRETIUS 1. 1-23

(A Study in Interpretation and Punctuation)

Lucretius 1.1-28, the opening sentence of the *De Rerum Natura*, I would punctuate as follows:

- Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
5 concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis—
te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum,
10 nam simul ac species patefactast verna diei
et reserata viget genitabilis aura Favoni,
aeriae primum volucres te, diva, tuumque
significant initum percussae corda tua vi,
inde ferae pecudes persultant pabula laeta
15 et rapidos tranant amnis (ita capta lepore
te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis),
denique per maria ac montis fluviosque rapacis
frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis
omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem
20 efficit ut cupide generatim saecla propagent—
quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas
nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,
te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse
25 quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor
Memmiadae nostro, quem tu, dea, tempore in omni
omnibus ornatum voluisti excellere rebus,
quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem.

At the bottom of this proposed repunctuation two principles lie: (1) punctuation is a most important adjunct to interpretation—an adjunct of which classical scholars avail themselves all too seldom; (2) the ancients thought in far longer groups of words than our modern system of pointing classical texts allows us, as a rule, to realize. See my remarks in *American Journal of Philology* 31 (1910), 72, note 1. The movement from the Roman system, with its practically complete absence of punctuation, to our highly complex modern system of (over)punctuation has at times brought serious losses, through hindrances to sound interpretation. Scholars trained through long years to a given punctuation find it hard to accept a new one. And yet some very brilliant contributions to classical scholarship have been made by way of changes in the punctuation.

In our passage Munro, Giussani, Merrill, and Bailey (to go no further)—all set a period after verse 9. This leaves the vocative of verses 1-2 in the air.

Now, in logic, verses 1-28 make one great sentence; in that sentence verses 1-23 constitute a long vocative. With *te* in 24, not with *te* in 6, the predicate of the sen-

tence begins, in logic. The statements in 6-9 the poet makes not for their own sake, but as part of the grounds on which he purposes, presently, when he has fully won Venus's interest, to appeal to her to bestow *aeternus lepor* on his verses (28). The words *te, dea . . . saecla propagent* (6-20) elaborate *caeli . . . lumina solis* (2-5), and are a subordinate part of the vocative. Verse 21 is resumptive of verses 3-5. In verse 21 either *quae* or *quoniam* might, in logic, be omitted. Both are used because the poet is striving hard, consciously or unconsciously, to set his readers straight concerning the syntax and the sense of the invocation. *Quae* exactly reproduces *quae . . . quae* of 3, but, since it is so far away from the vocative it modifies, it might well have seemed to the poet himself unclear and weak. *Quoniam* makes plain the fact that the statements in 21-23, which sum up and restate 2-20, constitute the grounds of the poet's appeal to the goddess for aid in his great task; it helps us realize better that verse 1 as a whole, *alma* in verse 2, and the relative clauses in 2-5 constitute grounds for the poet's appeal. Further, in this restatement in 21-23, *sine . . . exoritur* repeats closely, in sense and language both, *visitque exortum lumina solis*, 5.

The main point, then, to grasp in interpreting this passage is that, after such a vocative as we have in 1-2, considered alone, or in 1-5, considered alone, or in 1-23, taken as a whole, we expect an imperative of direct appeal to the goddess. For this the poet substitutes at first, in 24-27, a statement of his attitude toward the goddess; then, at last, in 28, he gives us the imperative for which, since his first words in 1, we have been waiting. If we grasp this connection of the passage as a whole, we shall, without hesitation, set a comma after *caelum*, 9, and commas after verses 13 and 16 (*primum*, 12, *inde*, 14, and *denique*, 17, introduce the three parts of the *nam*-clause, which covers 10-20). C. K.

DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION IN THE TEACHING OF THE CLASSICS¹

When the earliest beings, to whom might have justly been applied the adjective 'human', made their first attempts to communicate with other beings of a similar kind, it is fair to suppose that they made use of signs, and various grunts and gutturals, even if the precise

¹An address delivered at a meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, Baltimore, April 30, 1920. [This paper is reprinted from *Teachers College Record* 21, 217-237, May, 1920, with only such changes as are necessary to make it conform to the style sheet of THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY. I have, with Professor Lodge's consent, appended, in footnotes, a remark or two. C. K.]